FIRST 5 PLACER COUNTY
A NETWORK SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Vision

Purpose

Principles

**CFC Partner Network
Serving 0-5**

Resources
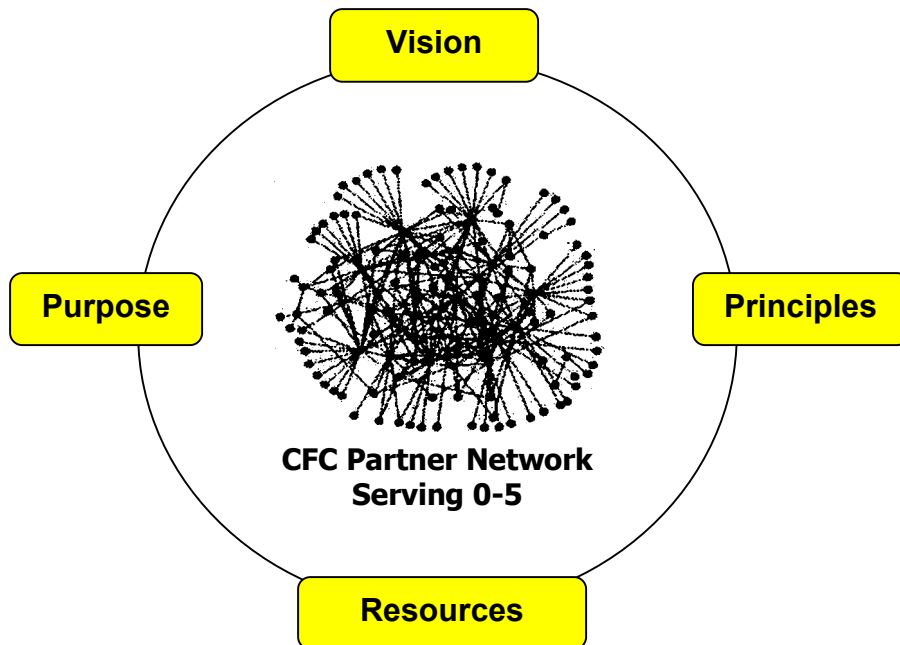
Purpose
This paper will serve as an introduction to some of the assumptions and fundamental relationships behind the operations of First 5 Placer County.

How Does First 5 Placer County Operate?
Over the past four years, Placer County has developed a unique approach towards the management and local implementation of the Children and Families Act. The program has been successful because they have developed relationships with many partners and through those relationships the partners have created a "network" of services and supports for young children. Thus, the type of organizational model that the Commission has developed is a network organization.

What Is A Network And How Can It Work In A Government Organization?
The network organization is actually a combination of different units that are combined to meet a specific set of demands. Although the model has quite an extensive history within organizations, they have grown popular in recent years because of the growing need for both speed and adaptation in the knowledge and information-based economy of the 21st century. Network organizations are hard to define in the traditional sense because they do not have the traditional structural characteristics of organizations. While the model is extremely flexible, it also presents demands for shared accountability, shared power and a commitment to a common purpose and vision.

> ### *Background on Networks*
> - Emerging in organizations due to the growth of technology
> - Conceptual model supports linkages and communications
> - Fits within and enhances existing structures
> - Demands shared accountability, shared power and common purpose

The great advantage is in the ability to tap into the 'already-existing' network, which means that the investment for the infrastructure is a fraction of what it would cost for one company to develop that type of organization.

A variation of the network organization and an enhancement of the living systems theory of organization is the Complex Adaptive System (CAS).

> ### *Complex Adaptive Networks are Well-Understood in the Natural Sciences*
>
> A new understanding has emerged in the Natural Sciences that can be applied directly to organizations. The well-known author, physicist and ecologist, Fritjof Capra asserts that as we continue to study networks, and come to new understandings about relationships in nature and ecosystems, the way we perceive nature is changing. For example, what we used to think of as the "food chain" in nature is actually better described now as a "food web".
>
> "Since living systems at all levels are networks, we must visualize the Web of Life as living systems (networks) interacting in network fashion with other systems (networks). In other words, the web of life consists of networks within other networks."
>
> "We tend to arrange these systems, all nesting within larger systems in a hierarchical scheme by placing larger ones above smaller ones in pyramidal fashion. But this is a human projection. In nature, there is no 'above' or 'below,' and there are no hierarchies. There are only networks nesting within networks." (Capra, Fritjof, <u>The Web of Life</u>. P.35 1996)

A Complex Adaptive System is a collection of individual agents, who have the freedom to act in unpredictable ways, and whose actions are interconnected such that they produce system-wide patterns (or paradigms). Examples of this form include: termite colonies, stock markets, the Internet, and children's play groups. Complex Adaptive Systems are robust systems, tolerant of error, self-repairing, simple to implement and require little specialization of interacting agents. Placer has used the power of self-organization typified by CAS to develop program and service delivery strategies for the 0-5 populations. Self-organization bounded by passion and responsibility has been a cornerstone of Placer's community engagement activities.

Complex Adaptive Networks

- Flexible, adaptable organizational structure
- Team-based, collaborative work processes
- Flat organizational structure
- Use of information technology to promote feedback and results accountability

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What does it take to make this model succeed?

In order to make this organization successful, partners are encouraged to recognize the value of trust and to treat each other with trust, respect and fairness. The partners must also recognize that the "community ecology" of social relationships and the networks of other partners are key to building and sustaining new, and managing existing relationships with children and families services providers.

Why not use the traditional model of government organization?

The traditional centralized-functional model can be very effective in routine and narrowly-focused organizational contexts – and First 5 Placer operates in both domains. However the goals of Proposition 10 are neither routine nor are they narrowly focused. Initially, the traditional services described in the legislation refer to three distinct focal areas: health, early care and education and, parent education and support services. Ultimately, Proposition 10 demands integration of those services and fundamental change as part of the creation of a new system of services and supports for children and families.

One concern in this newly emerging area is that relying on a single leader limits the opportunities for others to serve as leaders. Additionally, having to communicate up and down the traditional organizational hierarchy adds more time to each process. Because the model relies on functions (positions) to answer specific needs it becomes costly. Unfortunately, future priorities are often determined by the costs of supporting existing positions and not the actual needs of children and families.

Networks Address the Following Problems

- Single leader approach **limits** community participation and responsibility for outcomes
- Communications flow from the top-down and **adds time** to support the structure
- Centralized model **adds costs** to support the structure

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How well can this model function within the Proposition 10 framework?

Actually it can function very well because in many ways networks are compatible with the key goals of Proposition 10.

Goal	Network Solution
Integration of Services	Multiple networks respond to each other as opposed to being coordinated from a single point of command
Results Accountability	Each and every partner is accountable to each and every other partner (reciprocity). All partners have to move towards a results framework and eventually towards common reporting standards and process.
Sustainable Models of Funding	Solutions developed in networks have to be approved within the network and help the network to grow and develop. The likelihood of one agency consuming all the resources is minimized by group-wide communications, peer review and peer approval.
Flexible Approaches to Services for Children 0-5 and Their Families	The network is organized to support children and families. It can focus more upon the quality and the distribution of services and less upon the needs of the organizations that provide the services.

## How Are Positions Defined Within A "Network" Structure?

In a traditional organizational chart, people are defined by position or title. The use of the position denotes who is in charge of whom. Note the chart below.
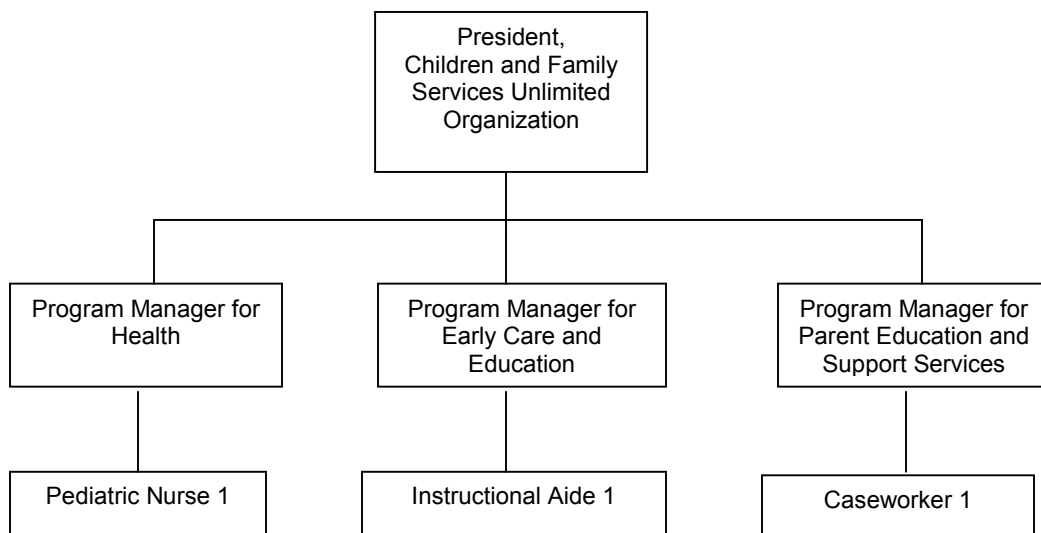
The rationale for labeling people by title is to support the need for control and order within the organization. If the Pediatric Nurse wanted to collaborate with the Instructional Aide (above), they would most likely need permission from their Program Managers. In The First 5 Placer County (Children and Families Commission) network, this permission

is freely granted and understood as the most desirable way to coordinate services. So in the network chart, people are defined by their expertise. The network diagram below illustrates how the services provided under the Memorandum of Understanding (a contract for support services) with Placer County are delivered. The network illustrates the various areas of expertise the county offers to First Five. Many of the services below are located within different departments within the county structure. Some are located outside of the county structure. The lines between the 'bubbles' indicate communication linkages between the areas of expertise. First Five does not "control" any of the people with the specified expertise, rather it is a cooperative relationship, whereby First Five receives (and anticipates) requests and receives the benefits of the services offered by each person with expertise. The quality, level and timing of the services are all regulated by real time feedback loops. As the parties to the contract discuss the services, their level of satisfaction is part of the feedback that determines how the services will be delivered in the future.

Network Diagram of Services Under the MOU with Placer County
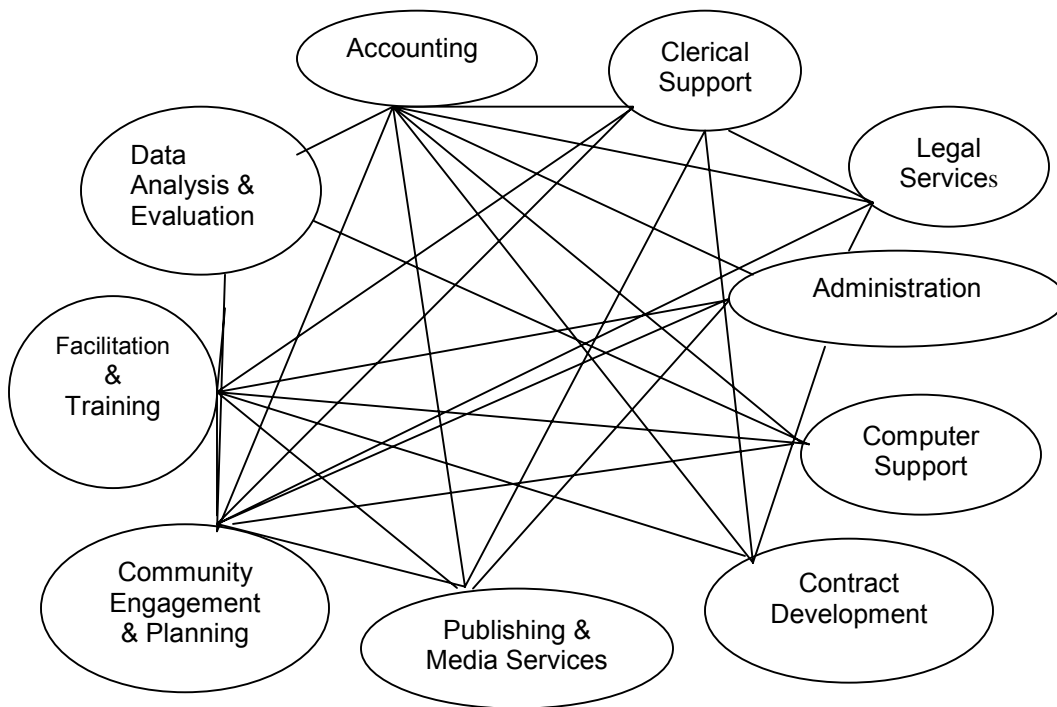
The diagram below illustrates the variety of linkages between agencies in the First Five Network in Placer County. While the organization titles are used in the bubbles, each organization brings a type of expertise to the network.

First 5 Network Diagram
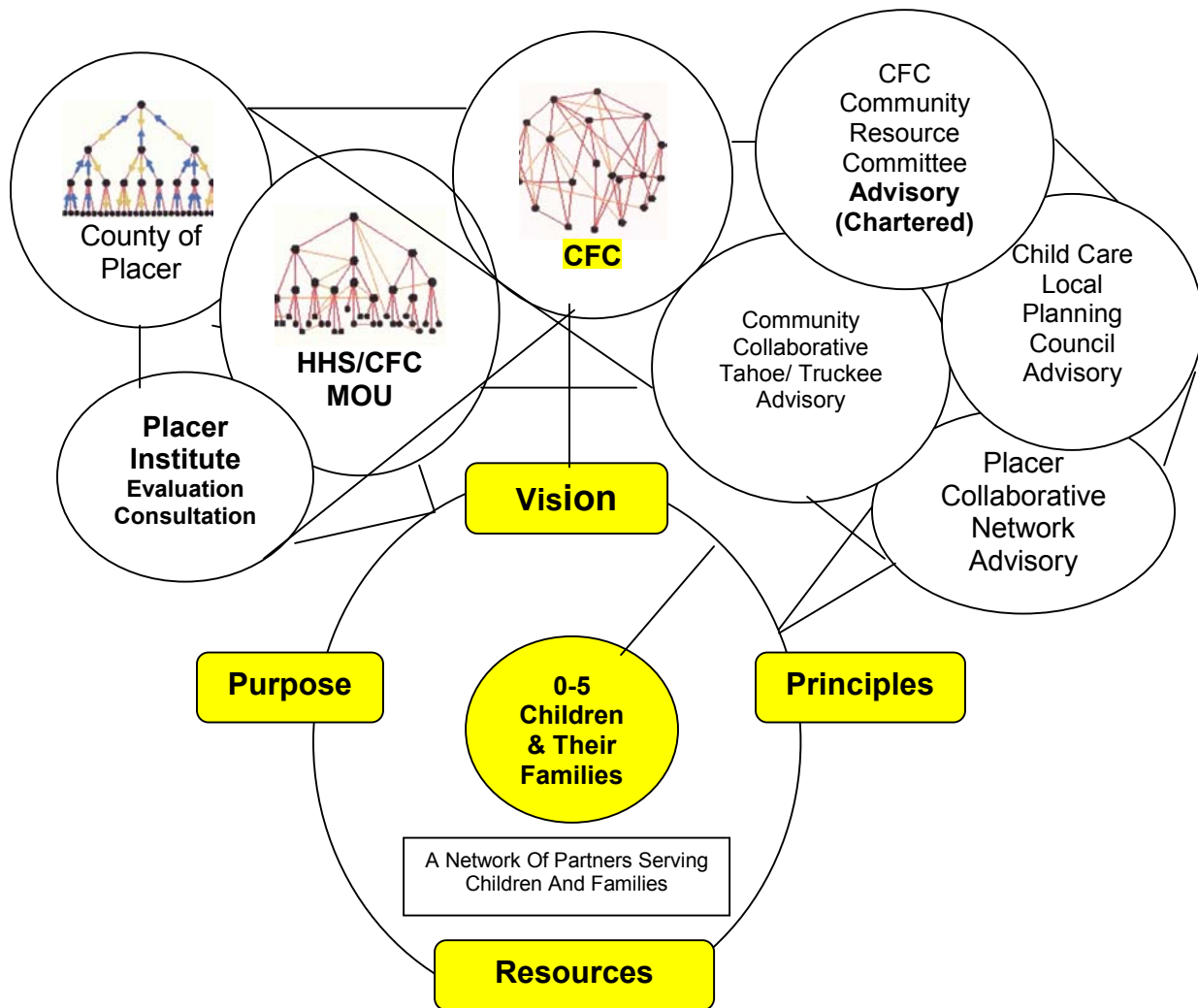
Understanding the Differences

In a Traditional Organization	In a Network Organization
People are defined by title	People are defined by expertise

Feedback and the Network Organization

Timely communications are so important to the successful implementation of Proposition 10. Indeed a great deal of the success in Placer County has been realized through the effective use of feedback in the Learning Conversation process replicated in the diagram below. Strong networks are based upon effective communications and feedback is central to communication.
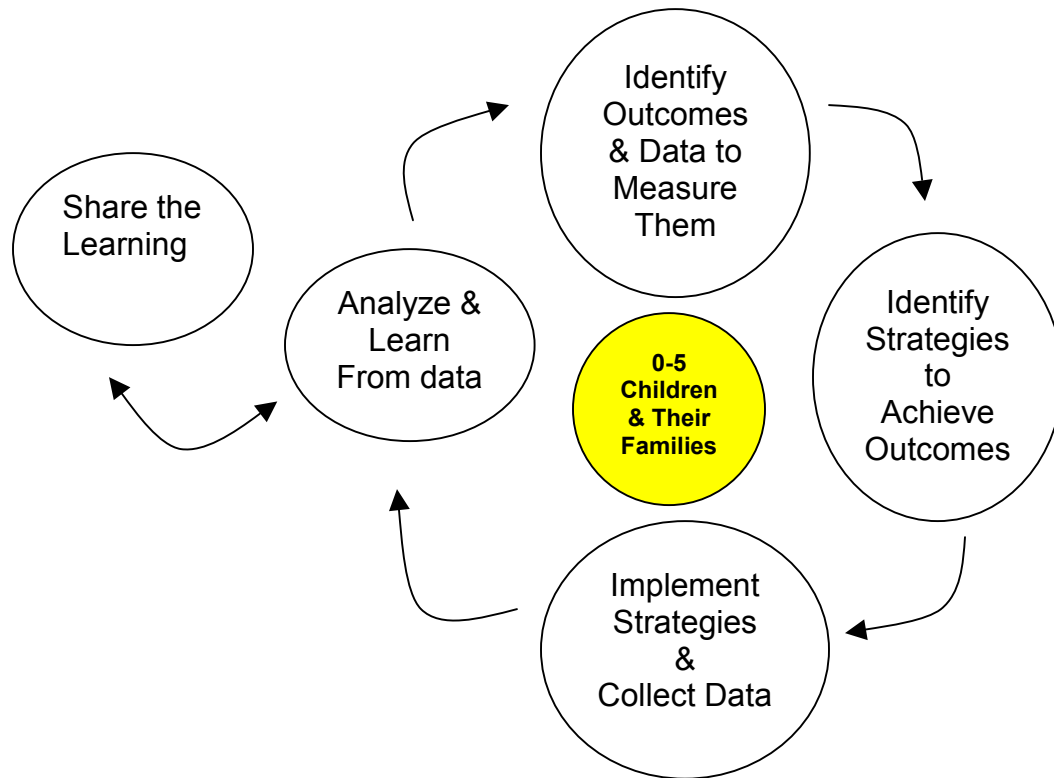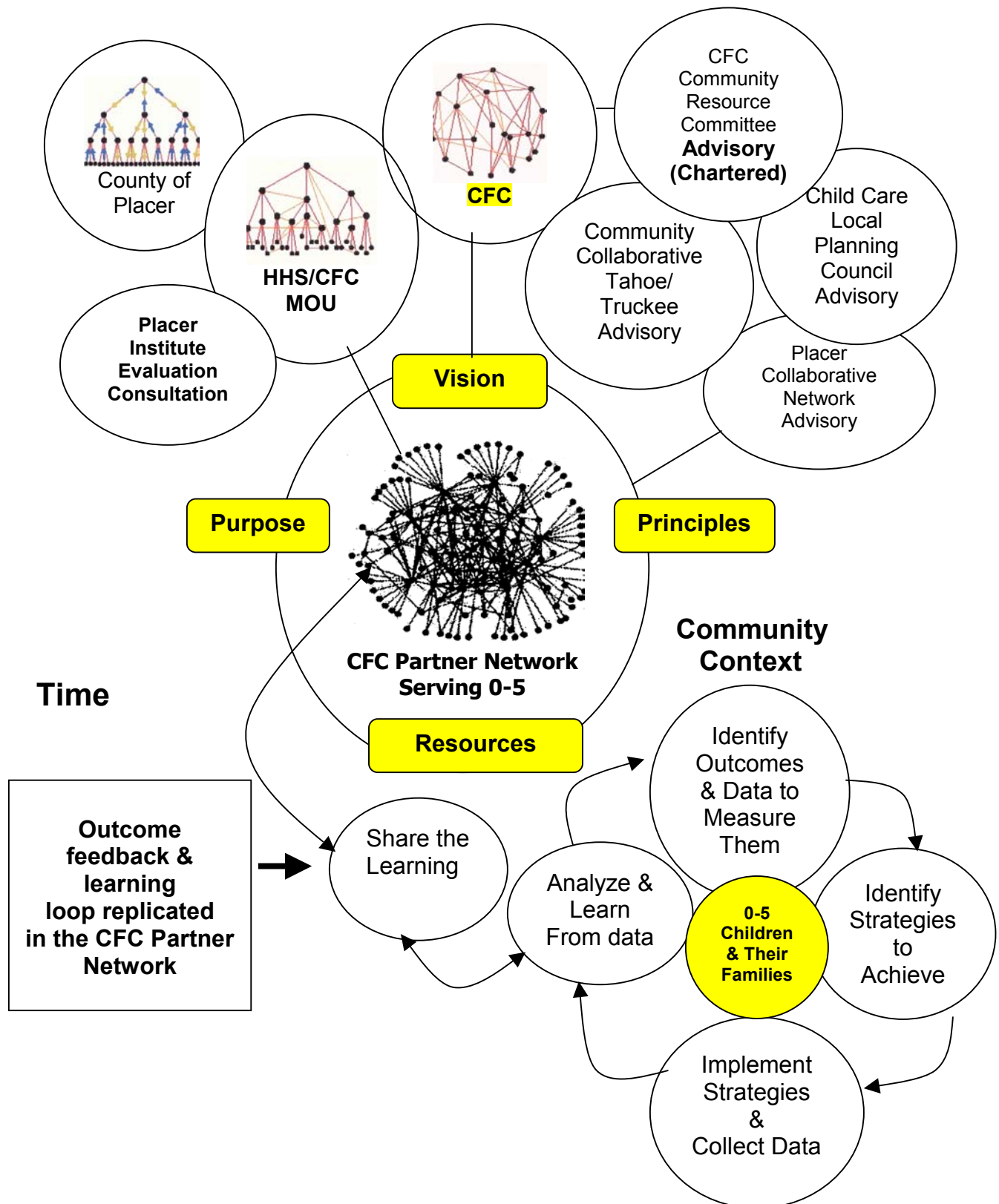

Fritjof Capra on Feedback and Networks

"The first and most obvious property of any network is its non-linearity—it goes in all directions. Thus the relationships in network patterns are non-linear relationships. In particular, an influence or message may travel along a cyclical path, which may become a feedback loop. The concept of feedback is intimately connected with the network pattern.

Because networks of communication may generate feedback loops, they may acquire the ability to regulate themselves. For example, a community that maintains an active network of communication will learn from its mistakes, because the consequences of a mistake will spread through the network and return to the source along feedback loops. Thus, the community can correct its mistakes, regulate itself, and organize itself. Indeed, self-organization has emerged as perhaps the central concept in the systems view of life, and like the concepts of feedback and self-regulation is linked closely to networks. The pattern of life, we might say, is a network pattern capable of self-organization. This is a simple definition, yet it is based on recent discoveries at the very forefront of science. " (Capra, Fritjof, The Web of Life. P.82-83 1996)

CFC Relational Chart

County of Placer

HHS/CFC MOU

Placer Institute Evaluation Consultation

CFC

CFC Community Resource Committee **Advisory (Chartered)**

Community Collaborative Tahoe/ Truckee Advisory

Child Care Local Planning Council Advisory

Placer Collaborative Network Advisory

Vision

Purpose

Principles

CFC Partner Network Serving 0-5

Resources

Community Context

Time

Outcome feedback & learning loop replicated in the CFC Partner Network

Share the Learning

Analyze & Learn From data

Identify Outcomes & Data to Measure Them

0-5 Children & Their Families

Identify Strategies to Achieve

Implement Strategies & Collect Data

Credits

This document was developed under the direction of Don Ferretti of First Five Placer County. Brad Morrison wrote much of the text based upon conversations with Commissioners, staff and partners in the Placer First Five Network, the references below, and continuing guidance from Don. This technical assistance was made possible under grants from the California Endowment and the Packard Foundation made to the California Association for Children and Families and the Center for Health Improvement.

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